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ABSTRACT

In the education of individuals with autism, it is crucial that programming focuses on developing a repertoire of lifetime skills. Information on an individual's strengths to use in educational planning can be gathered from standardized instruments, from observation in natural settings, and from interviews. It should be kept in mind that the learner with autism usually displays an uneven developmental profile. Educational planning should emphasize communication and independent functioning, with long-term goals for activities needed in adult life providing the basis for short-term objectives. Skills needed by young adults in the areas of self-care, personal management, home care, social and leisure, and work are listed. Sample long-range activity goals and measurable objectives are provided. (JDD)

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The University Affiliated Program of Indiana

FUNCTIONAL PROGRAMMING FOR PEOPLE WITH AUTISM: A SERIES...

DEVELOPING A FUNCTIONAL AND LONGITUDINAL INDIVIDUAL PLAN

by

Nancy Dalrymple

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Indiana Resource Center for Autism

Indiana University

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Bloomington, Indiana 47408

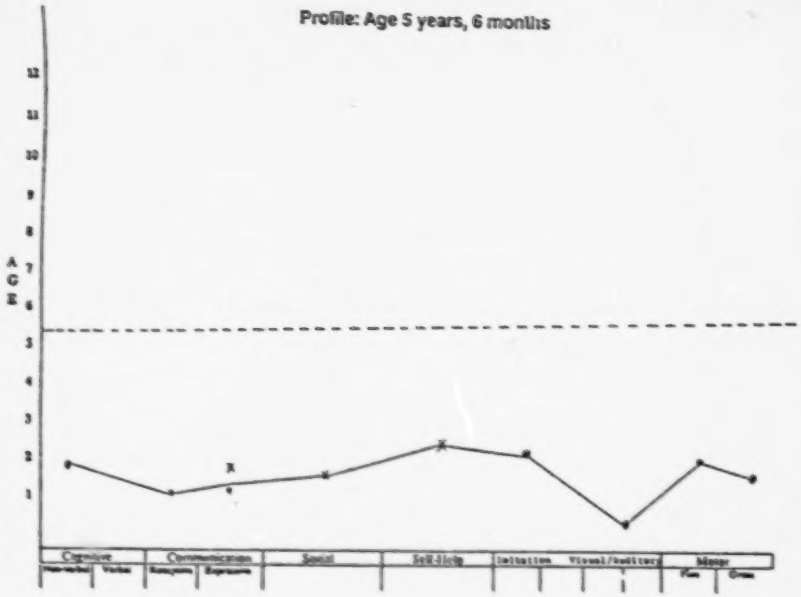
c. 1989

Education is a process that lasts a lifetime. Because individuals with autism are learners who depend so heavily on effective educational planning and intervention for success, they are extremely vulnerable when the process breaks down. It is vital that collateral information be available when making decisions, that assessment be viewed as an ongoing process, that accurate data be compiled on which to base decisions and that a longitudinal, functional approach be taken. It is crucial that programming focuses on developing a repertoire of lifetime skills.

Too often the weaknesses of the learner with autism are stressed in educational programs. The weaknesses are immediately apparent if developmental assessment instruments or conformity to school rules are stressed, rather than utilizing strengths and individualized teaching to plan for skills and behaviors that will be needed to function as independently as possible.

DISCOVERING STRENGTHS

When planning where to begin or what direction to take with students who have autism, it is much more important to know what they can do rather than what they cannot do. This information can be gathered from standardized norm-referenced or criterion referenced instruments, from observation in a variety of natural settings, and from interviews. It is often important to know where and with whom the person with autism does the particular skill, behavior, or activity. Identifying successful and enjoyable environments, materials, and activities provides valuable information for future planning. However, a word of caution. Just because an activity is not reported as something a person can do does not mean s/he can't do it. People with autism often do not initiate and may avoid new places, people, materials, and activities until they become familiar with and learn how to manage the stimuli. The learner with autism usually displays an uneven developmental profile. The following are typical: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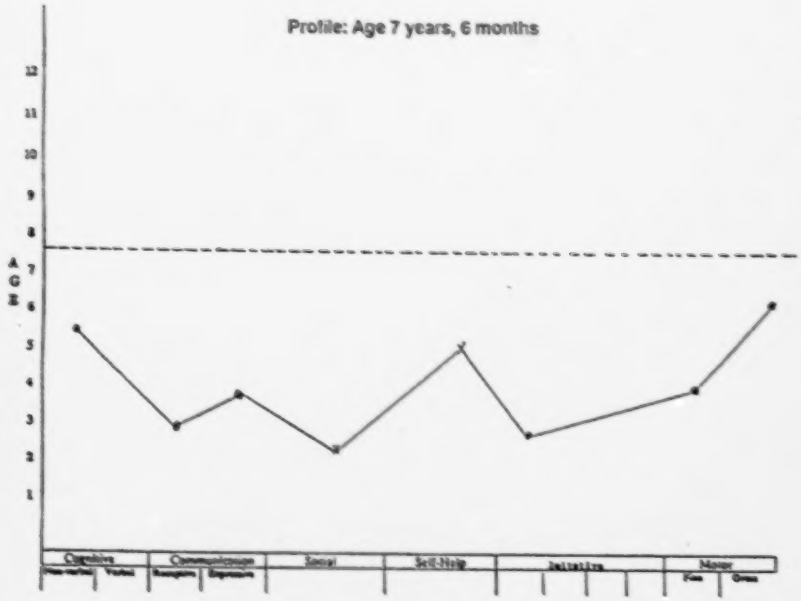
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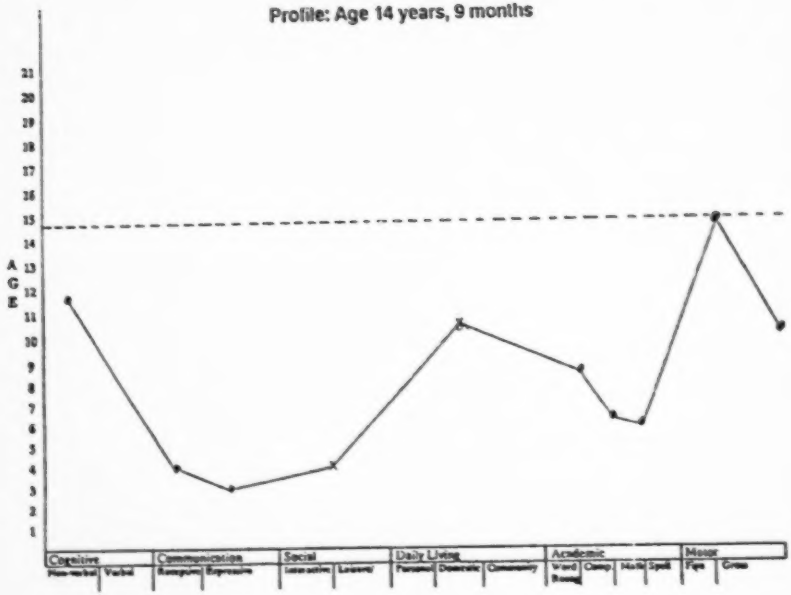
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Daily Living
Academic
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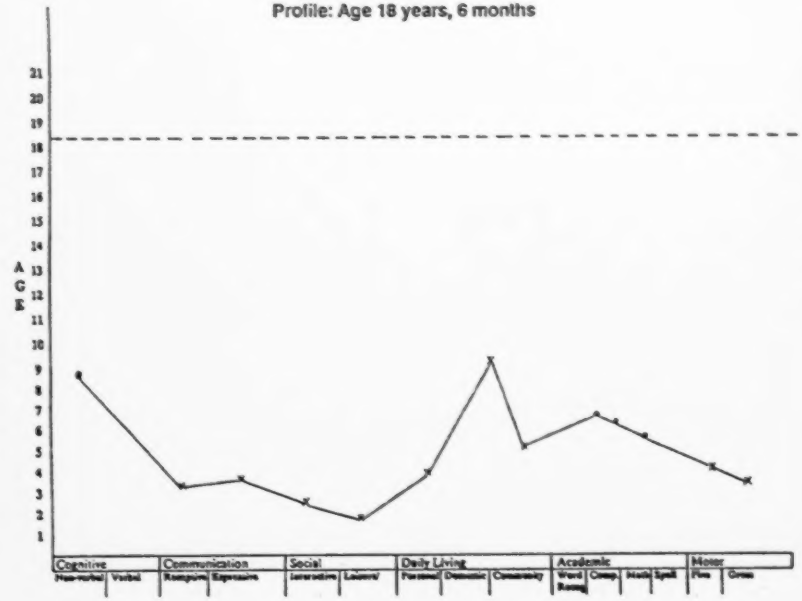
Spell.
Fine
Gross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Spell.
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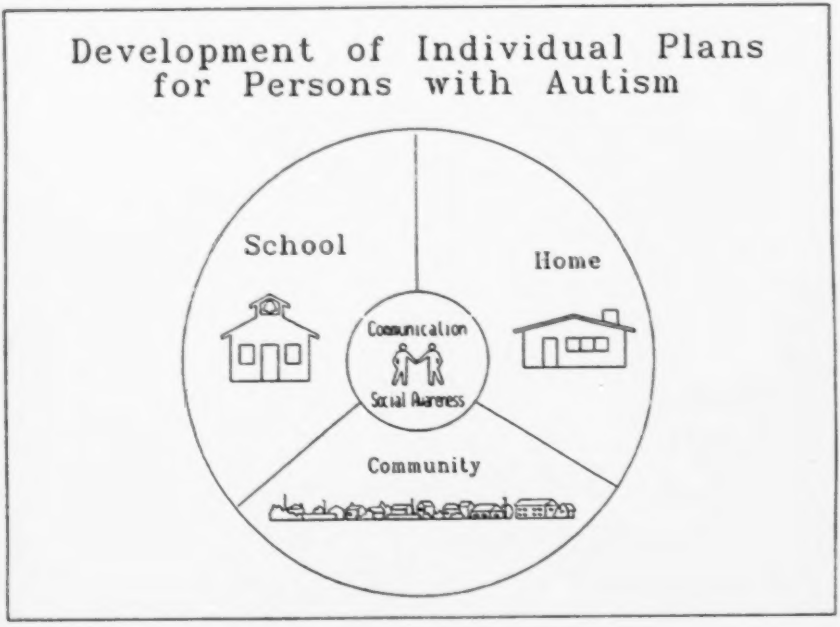
COMPONENTS OF THE IEP

Because communication is central to successful living, working, and socializing with others, it must be the cornerstone of educational planning. Opportunities to communicate, encouragement of attempts, and appropriate modes must be found. The individual with autism will be extremely dependent throughout life without the power of a communication system to express wants, needs, choices, and opinions. Rather than being an isolated component of the curriculum, communication is central to all aspects of the educational program for the student with autism. Socialization and interaction are then possible and encouraged.



TEST OF ADULT FUNCTIONING

Striving for independent functioning is also a cornerstone of program planning. The test of functionality requires answering the following questions:

- Will the learner need someone to do this skill for him/her as an adult if s/he does not learn it?

With this question before us, let's discuss ways to develop an educational plan emphasizing the development of functional skills that project longitudinal needs. Is it important to change the weaknesses, and if so, which ones and how? When developing a program that strives for the individual to function as independently and productively as possible as an adult, the following questions must also be answered.

- What does s/he need to function as a contributing adult in our society, in the community?
- Will the learner be isolated from others if s/he does not learn it?
- How can his/her strengths be used effectively? How can s/he be successful?
- How can teaching strategies plan for growth of independence when the person appears so dependent?

Consider some of the following skills needed by young adults in our society:

<u>Self-Care</u>

Modesty - dress, undress, toilet, bathe, engage in sexual activity in private; discuss private matters only with specific persons, touch and allow touching only with "good" friends.

Cleanliness - care for body, hair, grooming, clean clothes, so that one is not offensive to others.

Belongings - keep property in relative order and repair, be responsible for transporting personal belongings and keeping track of same.

Personal Management

Health Care - see doctor, dentist and other specialists on a regular basis and when there is a problem. Apply first aid and take medicines.

Money - earn, spend, save, and manage money through checks, money movers, credit cards, and cash.

Transportation - drive, walk, bike, or access public transport or friends to get to and from places on time.

Shopping - plan, find, pay.

Personal Information - produce, write or tell name, address, age, phone number, social security number to others.

Home Care

Cooking - cut; measure; mix; operate microwave, toaster, oven, burners, refrigerator, coffee maker, etc.

Upkeep/repairs - change light bulbs, use tools, care for lawns, paint, etc.

Cleaning - make and strip beds, do laundry, sweep, clean kitchens and bathrooms, scrape and wash dishes, dust, etc.

Social and Leisure

Fitness - swim, walk, jog, bike, aerobics, etc.

Home - watch TV, use computers, do arts and crafts, read, listen to music, play games/cards, etc.

Community - go to spectator sports, movies, concerts, visiting, bars; participate at Y-Centers, bowling alleys, and video arcades, etc.

With Others - play card games, eat out, play computer games.

Work

Communicate needs.

Follow directions.

Come to and stay at the job.

Complete the job accurately.

Be productive.

Manage free time.

Social interaction and communication are part of each of these areas.

APPLICATION FOR VARIOUS AGES

Whether planning for a five, ten or twelve year old it is important to decide what activities will receive priority so that long-term planning towards activities needed in adult life are in place.

Long-term goals provide the base for short-term objectives. As early as possible activity-based goals should be established so the direction of the program is clear. This eliminates debate on whether to work towards the goal or not. The question really becomes what objectives will establish the point of teaching toward that goal. The place to begin depends on present skills and performance; the priority of time and emphasis depends on age and individual needs.

Examples of long-term activity-based goals with ideas for a few objectives across areas might be:

Will work at a job for two hours with minimal supervision.

- Will follow work directions and rules.
- Will work accurately.
- Will work continuously and finish work.

Will independently dress, eat, groom, and take care of toilet needs.

- Will use the toilet in all settings during breaks.
- Will choose clothes and dress independently.

Will take care of personal belongings and home chores with minimal supervision.

- Will carry a wallet or purse with ID and money.

- Will rinse dishes and load the dishwasher each night.

Will shop independently for needed items.

- Will choose what to buy.
- Will locate items from list.

Will participate with others in community activities.

- Will eat with others in sit-down fast-food restaurants.
- Will go to movies.
- Will go to sports events.

Will participate in individual fitness and sport activities. Will independently jog/walk a mile on a track.

- Will do aerobic exercises for 20 minutes daily.
- Will swim laps at least 3 times a week.

Will participate in parallel group activities and interactive activities with one to three people.

- Will bowl once a week.
- Will participate in computer games.
- Will participate in board games.
- Will participate in TV watching.

Will communicate wants and needs in all settings and respond to requests in all settings.

* This goal must be worked on in all objectives with specific communication activities identified for each.

If the activity is identified early as being important, some incidental learning will occur as the student is given more and more responsibility and independence. The targeted objectives will change as the learner succeeds. New objectives emerge through an ongoing assessment process. If an older student has not had success with earlier experiences, the measurable objectives must start with steps that the student needs to learn and at which s/he can succeed. Adjustments

in methods and materials used in teaching will have to be made. One or more objectives can be worked on at once as long as the individual is succeeding.

Example One - Leisure/Fitness

Long Range Activity Goal: D. will independently jog a mile around the indoor track.

Possible Measurable Objectives: (Choose only one)

- D. will walk/jog two laps with an instructor, get a nickel for each lap, then trade these for juice.
- D. will walk one lap, jog one lap for a total of 8 laps, mark off the laps with a counter, then buy a coke in the lounge area, using visual cues.

Example Two - Personal Management

Long Range Activity Goal: J. will shop independently at Target for personal items.

Possible Measurable Objectives:

- J. will walk through the store for 3 minutes with adult.
- J. will choose two items.
- J. will locate pencils, pens, and pads of paper in the store.
- J. will carry his/her wallet or purse with money, ID, and personal belongings for the items.

Example Three - Leisure

Long Range Activity Goal: M. will eat a meal at a sit-down restaurant with a group.

Possible Measurable Objectives:

- M. will choose one item from two choices, sit down to eat or drink, then leave.
- M. will wait while others order, choose two items from a picture list, eat, and wait for others to finish before leaving.

Add more responsibility, more waiting time, and more social and communication skills as the learner progresses and learns new skills.

Notice that choice-making, communication, waiting, dealing with stimuli, and reward are part of these activity routines. These skills can be built into school and class activities and routines as well. The activity may not be reinforcing while it is being learned; therefore, additional reinforcements are usually needed until the activity itself becomes reinforcing.

Example Four - Work:

Long Range Activity Goal: S. will work continuously and accurately (assembling, cleaning, operating computer, preparing food, typing, or doing office work) for two hours.

Possible Measurable Objectives:

- S. will wipe tables in the cafeteria until all are clean.
- S. will respond to contingency, e.g "Do this, then this."
- S. will ask for help.
- S. will imitate from a model or drawing.
- S. will work in sequenced order.
- S. will check off items completed.
- S. will organize the environment as directed.

Example Five - Leisure:

Long Range Activity Goal: T. will independently choose activities in free time and stay busy in free time area for an hour.

Possible Measurable Objectives:

- T. will choose a toy when presented with two, take it to a carpeted area and stay there for five minutes.
- T. will choose between four activities, use one for at least ten minutes, put it away, choose another and use it for at least ten minutes, then put it away.
- T. Will choose an activity from a choice board and do the activity for 20 minutes, will put it away, then choose another activity and do for 20 minutes.

Summary

Because it often takes a long time to learn the skills and behaviors necessary to complete a long-term goal, the more specifically the goal is stated the better. In other words, the goal of participating in individual fitness and sport activities will most likely become a reality when the individual is an adult if the specific activities are targeted and worked on for several years. Take into consideration what really can be done by the individual, with his/her family and in his/her community. Swimming, jogging, aerobic exercises, bike riding, cross-country skiing, or weight machines might be chosen depending on the community and the people involved.

Remember to project adult and future requirements, then ask:

- Why does s/he need this skill/activity?
- Will someone have to do it for him/her if it is not learned?
- How can s/he succeed in becoming as independent as possible?
- Will the quality of his/her life be enhanced by learning this?
- Will s/he become a more competent adult with this skill/activity?
- Are his/her peers learning this skill/activity?